

University of Nashville, Literary Department Building
(now Children's Museum)
724 Second Avenue, North
Nashville
Davidson County
Tennessee

HABS No. TN-18

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PHOTOGRAPHS

HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Architectural and Engineering Record
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HABS No. TN-18

UNIVERSITY OF NASHVILLE, LITERARY DEPARTMENT BUILDING
(now Children's Museum)

Location: 724 Second Avenue, South, Nashville, Davidson County,
Tennessee

Present Owner: Metropolitan Government of Nashville and Davidson County

Significant: Begun in 1853 by Major Adolphus Heiman, one of Nashville's pioneer architects, the main building for the University of Nashville inaugurated the rich tradition of collegiate Gothic architecture in Nashville. Housing the Literary Department of the University, the building was one of the first permanent structures of higher learning in the city. The University of Nashville was one of the pioneer educational institutions in the State of Tennessee, its ancestry antedating Tennessee statehood.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History

1. Date of Erection: The cornerstone was laid on April 7, 1853. The completed building was dedicated on October 4, 1854.
2. Architect: Adolphus Heiman. However, he was not the architect first selected by the Board of Trustees, their initial choice having been the eminent Greek Revivalist Isaiah Rogers, who had moved from Boston to Cincinnati. On March 4, 1852, the Building Committee of the Board of Trustees for the University of Nashville reported that they had engaged the services of Isaiah Rogers, then of Cincinnati, as architect. Mr. Rogers had examined the building site and had prepared a plan for the building. The Trustees adopted this plan with minor changes ("Minutes of the Meeting, Nashville, May 4, 1852," in University of Nashville Records. Vol. II: 1852-1906, pp. 8-9; cf. "Minutes," April 30, 1852, p. 16). However, the Trustees apparently realized that the building which they had authorized would exceed their financial capacities, for nothing further ever came of this project.

In the winter of 1853, a "Building and Executive Committee" was appointed by the Board of Trustees. Its task was "to erect such buildings upon such plans as to them may seem best, upon the grounds of the University, upon which the President's House is situated, which buildings are not to exceed in cost the sum of thirty thousand dollars, with full power to sell or use all or any part of the personal or real estate of said University in the erection of such buildings" At this same meeting, it

was also determined "that the plan of the building adopted 4 March, 1852, be abandoned, and that said Resolution be rescinded, and that the Committee appointed to carry out said plan be discharged from any further duties" ("Minutes," February 19, 1853, pp. 19-21). By the following November, the Building Committee reported that it had appointed a new architect, Major Adolphus Heiman of Nashville.

3. Original and Subsequent Owners: The Board of Trustees decided to build the new college building on the tract on which the President's home was located. This was part of the land purchased from Henry Middleton Rutledge in 1825 (Allen Kelton, "The University of Nashville, 1850-1875," Ph.D. dissertation, George Peabody College for Teachers, 1969, p. 455; no deed found at courthouse). In August 1909, the University of Nashville was conveyed to the Peabody Educational Fund (R.O.D.C. Deed Book 372, p. 560) which, in turn, conveyed the University to George Peabody College in the following year (R.O.D.C. Deed Book 371, p. 445). Later in the same year, 1910, George Peabody College conveyed the University of Nashville grounds and buildings to Vanderbilt University (R.O.D.C. Deed Book 379, p. 687). In 1939, Vanderbilt sold the University of Nashville property to the City of Nashville (R.O.D.C. 1086, p. 582). While the latter maintains ownership of the property, the old Main Building was contributed by the City of Nashville to the Nashville Children's Museum, founded in 1945, under a nominal rental agreement.
4. Original plans and construction: None of Heiman's drawings is known to have survived. A contemporary account explains that the Building and Executive Committee "determined to . . . (erect the building) of stone rather than brick, though the former was more costly and may render it necessary to exceed the sum of 30,000 in the expense of building. The plan of the building adopted by the Committee has been seen probably by most of the Board. It is not contemplated at present to erect the whole of the building contemplated in the plan but only as much as may be sufficient for the Literary Department of the University" ("Minutes," November 5, 1853, p. 23).

The Annual Announcement for 1854 of the University of Nashville states that "the Trustees are now erecting a magnificent stone edifice, at a cost of about \$45,000," and that the portion under construction was only "the centre of the building represented on the frontispiece. The wings (a spacious Chapel and Museum), are yet to be erected" (Annual Announcement (University of Nashville, 1854), n.p.n.).

A Nashville architect has made interesting though controversial observations on the construction of the building: "The Nashville Children's Museum is in better condition than is our State Capitol. (The latter was refurbished in 1955). It is my personal opinion that Heiman, as a stone carver, did a better job of selecting each stone than did Strickland on the Capitol. He had all of the stones laid on their natural beds. For these reasons there has been very little weathering and spalling. Only at the sloping watertable near the first floor level of this building has weathering revealed seams and cleavages. The (interior) construction of this building is what we call mill construction today. It is rough sawed 3 x 15' with a single floor above and plaster on wood lath beneath" (Clinton Parrent, Jr., "Adolphus Heiman and the Building Methods of Two Centuries," Tennessee Historical Quarterly, XII (1953), 208).

6. Alterations and additions: Unfortunately, no records in any form have been uncovered to make clear the numerous stages of remodeling and alterations which have surely been made to the building. As was noted above, the two end pavilions were not erected either at the outset or since. This is unfortunate because, judging from the engraving of the whole published in the Annual Announcement (1854), they would have added considerably to the effectiveness of the total composition.

What is not clear, however, is whether the tower noted on the above engraving was ever erected. Subsequent engravings published in the catalogues for the Sessions of 1855-56 and 1870-71 both depict the building without the aforementioned end pavilions, but include an elaborate tower over the central pavilion. This tower resembles the initial engraving contained in the 1854 catalogue, but has added a secondary open belfry surmounting it. However, the map, "Nashville, Tennessee in the 1880's," drawn and published by H. Wellge and Co., Milwaukee, 1888, depicts the building without any tower whatever, save for a moderately pitched roof over what clearly is the base of such a tower on the roof of the central portion of the building. Unfortunately, no documents could be uncovered to make clear whether a tower did in fact exist originally and, if so, when and under what circumstances it might have been removed.

These engravings also suggest that, originally, the buttresses were surmounted by pinnacles that were removed in later years. Again, no documentary material could be located to substantiate the existence of such pinnacles or their subsequent removal.

The only alterations about which anything is known are those made to the interior of the building to accommodate the Children's Museum, which was housed there from 1945. A wing was also added to the rear of the building. Architects for this remodeling and alteration were Brush, Hutchison & Gwinn of Nashville, Tennessee.

B. Historical Context:

The University of Nashville had its beginnings as Davidson Academy, chartered by the State of North Carolina in 1785. This school, originally located six miles east of Nashville, was moved to Nashville early in the nineteenth century. Davidson Academy was rechartered as Cumberland College in 1806, and was given a federal land grant of fifty thousand acres. The Tennessee General Assembly failed to sell these lands and make the proceeds available, and in 1816 Cumberland College was forced to suspend operation. In 1824 the college was reopened under the presidency of Philip Lindsley, formerly of the College of New Jersey. Although the name of the institution was changed to the University of Nashville in 1826, it remained a liberal arts college throughout Philip Lindsley's twenty-five year tenure. President Lindsley resigned in 1850 and in that year the work of the University was suspended pending the building of a new plant on another site.

A group of Nashville physicians leased the old college buildings and opened a Medical Department of the University of Nashville in 1851. This department was a success from its beginning. It was perhaps through this department that the University of Nashville attained its greatest fame and wielded its greatest influence during the third quarter of the nineteenth century.

The Literary Department was reopened on the new campus, in the building designed by Heiman, in 1854. With this move the University of Nashville diversified its curriculum and added professional training, thus assuming more of the characteristics implied by the nature of a university. This attempt, however, soon met with failure, as the entire faculty resigned in February of 1855. At this time John Berrien Lindsley, son of Philip Lindsley, was named "Chancellor" of the University of Nashville, and a reorganization of the institution was effected through the union of the Literary Department with the Western Military Institute. This institution flourished on the campus of the University of Nashville until the Civil War caused its suspension. The buildings of the University were used by the Federal authorities as a military hospital and as barracks for troops during the Civil War.

In 1867 the trustees of the University opened a preparatory school. The curriculum of this school was expanded to include the first two years of college work in 1869. In 1870 the Literary Department and the Montgomery Bell Academy were leased to Generals Edmund K. Smith and Bushrod R. Johnson for a period of fifteen years. The University did not prosper during this period, however, and this arrangement was discontinued in 1875. During these five years, the main building housed the Medical College of the University of Nashville, which had continued holding regular sessions throughout the war through the unceasing efforts and some financial assistance on the part of Nashville physicians themselves.

In 1875 the Board of Trustees of the University of Nashville entered into an agreement with the Tennessee State Board of Education and the Trustees of the Peabody Education Fund to establish the Peabody State Normal School at the University. From that time until 1910, the main building was used by the institution, known then as "Peabody College," but whose diplomas were still issued under the University of Nashville charter.

By 1909, the Peabody board had determined to apply its trust funds to the establishment of the George Peabody College for Teachers. This institution was incorporated on October 5, 1909, and the location of the new college was fixed by its charter to lie "in close proximity to Vanderbilt University." Despite the objections of residents in the area, the former University of Nashville campus was conveyed in the fall of 1910 by the Trustees of Peabody College to Vanderbilt University in exchange for land received from the latter adjacent to its campus.

From 1911 until it finally was relocated on the main Vanderbilt campus, the Vanderbilt School of Medicine used the main building of the old University of Nashville. Vanderbilt continued in possession of the property until the city of Nashville acquired ownership through condemnation proceedings in 1939.

Although the city contemplated razing the building for safety reasons, the Tennessee Historical Society undertook measures for its preservation and use. Mayor Thomas L. Cummings placed the building in the custody of the Historical Society on condition that a use for it would be found. Though plans were being formulated to convert it to a museum of Nashville history, the Historical Society acceded to the request by the Tennessee State Guard to use the building as an armory for its Nashville units.

In 1945 the building became the quarters of the Children's Museum. The building was restored and the formal opening of the Museum was held on October 30 of that year. The Children's Museum Association of Nashville was founded in 1945 as a private non-profit organization to "promote a better understanding and appreciation by children and others of wildlife, nature and the world in which they live." This function continues in the building at the present time. (Allen Kelton, "The University of Nashville, 1850-1875." Ph.D. dissertation, George Peabody College, 1969, abstract and pp. 1-5; "The Historical Background of Peabody College," Bulletin of George Peabody College for Teachers, XXX (October 1941), 26-31; and "Historical News and Notices," Tennessee Historical Quarterly, IV (Dec., 1945), 365-366, concerning the opening of the Children's Museum).

C. Sources of Information

1. Early Views:

An important engraving of the building, assumed to represent Heiman's initial complete design, is published in the Annual Announcement of the Law, Literary, and Medical Departments of the University of Nashville. Session of 1854-55 (Nashville, 1854), n.p.n. Used as frontispiece.

An engraving of the campus, which includes the Main Building without the end pavilions but with the central tower as previously described, is contained in the University of Nashville, Collegiate Department. Western Military Institute. The Official Register of Cadets and Students for the Collegiate Year 1855-56 and Rules and Regulations with Annual Announcements of Faculty and Officers for 1856-57 (Nashville, 1856), frontispiece.

A similar, though not identical, engraving is contained in the Catalogue of the Officers and Students of the Literary Department of the University of Nashville for the Session of 1870-71 (Nashville, July 1871), frontispiece.

A depiction of the building is provided by a portion of the map, "Nashville, Tennessee in the 1880's," drawn and published by H. Wellge and Co., Milwaukee, 1888.

A general plan of the grounds, locating the Main Building, is contained in C. M. Hopkins, Atlas of the City of Nashville, Tennessee (Philadelphia, 1889), Plate 4.

A photograph of the main facade of the building is published in Lucius S. Merriam, Higher Education in Tennessee (Washington, D.C., 1893), p. 47.

A photograph of the College Building in 1904 from the University of Nashville's Garnet and Blue Vol. III, as well as two other historic views, are found in Sara Sprott Morrow "Adolphus Heiman's Legacy to Nashville," Tennessee Historical Quarterly 23: 10-12.

A more detailed plan of the building (dimensioning exterior walls and locating principal interior partitions) is contained in the Sanborn Map Co. Insurance Maps of Nashville, Tennessee (New York, 1914), Vol. 2, Plate 175.

2. Bibliography

a. Primary Sources:

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University of Nashville Records. Volume II, 1852-1906.

Minutes of the Board of Trustees of the University of Nashville, 1852-1906. On deposit in the Manuscripts Section of the Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee. Microfilm copy on deposit at the Peabody Library, Nashville, Tennessee.

b. Secondary Sources:

Annual Announcement of the Law, Literary, and Medical Departments of the University of Nashville. Session of 1854-55. Nashville: Nashville Medical Journal, 1854.

Catalogue of the Literary and Medical Departments of the University of Nashville: 1858-59. Nashville: John T. S. Fall, 1859.

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"The Historical Background of Peabody College," Bulletin of George Peabody College for Teachers. XXX, no. 10 (October 1941). Special issue on the history of the college.

"Historical News and Notices." Tennessee Historical Quarterly, II, no. 1 (March 1943), p. 90. Includes the Report, "A Landmark Goes to War," by Edwin A. Keeble, Chairman of the Tennessee Historical Society's Committee to Preserve the old University of Nashville Building.

"Historical News and Notices." Tennessee Historical Quarterly, IV, no. 4 (December 1945), 365-366. A report on the opening of the Children's Museum at the old University of Nashville building, including a brief history of both.

Kelton, Allen. "The University of Nashville, 1850-75." Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, George Peabody College for Teachers, 1969.

Mahoney, Nell Savage. "Towers and Turrets: The University of Nashville." Nashville Tennessean Magazine (December 9, 1951), 26.

Merriam, Lucius S. Higher Education in Tennessee. No. 16 in the Contributions to American Educational History series. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1893.

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Prepared by: Anatole Senkevitch, Jr.
Architectural Historian
Historic American Buildings Survey
Summer 1970

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: This Gothic Revival-style building features crenellation and buttresses.
2. Condition of fabric: Good; fire damage to joists in attic.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: The two-story building in a cruciform plan measures 173'-9" x 96'-0".
2. Foundations: Stone; brick piers support the central hall space and the four fireplaces.
3. Walls: Natural gray ashlar limestone.
4. Structural system, framing: Load-bearing wall with wood joist flooring system. Buttressing at all corners and between the windows on the front.
5. Porches: Five risers and stoop providing vestibule entry.
6. Chimneys: There are four chimneys, two in the southeast wing and two in the great hall.
7. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: Tudor-arched doorway has stone hoodmold. The transom equally divides the 14' high doorway, with wood tracery above and double nine-light doors below.
 - b. Windows: Wooden double-hung windows with four-over-four-light sash. Second-floor window over doorway is stone plate tracery, with stone hoodmold, encasing two double-hung lancet windows with five-over-four-light sash. The basement, southeast wing and rear of central mass, have double wood casement windows, opening in, with one light per window.
8. Roof:
 - a. Shape, covering: Hipped roofs intersecting at various levels; the wings being the lowest and the central hall space being the highest.
 - b. Cornice, eaves: A parapet wall along roofline has battlements except over the entrance pavilion where it is simply corniced.

C. Description of the Interior:

1. Floor plans:
 - a. Basement: The basement is under the great hall and the southeast wing. The remaining area is partially excavated. The area under the great hall is divided into three rooms

and served by a hall connecting each to the staircases. This hall continues through the southeast wing along the southeast wall and affords exit by an added stairwell. The hall serves three rooms under the southeast wing.

- b. First floor: The projecting vestibule, flanked by smaller rooms, leads directly into the central hall space, elevated five risers. This space is transversed by a hall leading to each wing. Ahead of this space is the great hall, elevated two risers, the plan of which is a Greek cross with an apse end. To each side, rectangular stair wells are located. The northwest wing was one large space, now divided by a partition wall. The southeast wing has three large rooms served by the central transverse hall.
 - c. Second and third floors: The second and third floors are similar to the first. There is also a room over the vestibule of the same configuration. The third floor space over the great hall was added at a later time.
 - d. Attic: The attic is unfinished with access from a crawl door above the south stairwell.
- 2. Stairways: The two stairways are similar, having landings between the first and second floors and straight stairs to the basement and third-floor addition. The stair has a simple handrail, newels, and two tapered balusters per tread. The string molding is rather ornate.
 - 3. Flooring: The vestibule is marble, the central hall space is tile, the rest is narrow hardwood boards.
 - 4. Wall and ceiling finish: Painted plaster on walls and ceiling.
 - 5. Doorways and doors: Typical door is wood with panels, all trim painted gray. Doors of the central hall space, first and second floors, are double within Tudor-arched doorways. The doors to the vestibule central hall space have been replaced with iron gates.
 - 6. Decorative features: Entry vestibule has two brick niches flanking entry to central hall space.

D. Sites:

- 1. General setting: The building faces southwest atop a large rolling hill. A service road fronts the building.

2. Outbuildings: Recent attachments include a children's theatre to the northwest, and large display area to the northeast. Both are one-story structures. Two smaller structures are attached to the southeast corner -- a workshop and basement stair egress.

Prepared by: Roy C. Pledger
Project Supervisor
Historic American Buildings Survey
June 1970

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

This project was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) in cooperation with the Tennessee Historical Commission and the Historic Sites Federation of Tennessee. This structure was measured and drawn in the summer of 1971, under the direction of James C. Massey, Chief of HABS; Roy C. Pledger (Texas A & M University), project supervisor; Daryl P. Fortier (University of Minnesota), architect; and by student architects Gilbert M. Glaubinger (Rhode Island School of Design), Steve P. Roberts (Ohio State University), and Barry S. Williams (Texas A & M University), at the HABS field office, Vanderbilt University, Nashville, Tennessee. The written historical data were prepared by Anatole Senkevitch, Jr. (University of Virginia), in the summer of 1970. Jack E. Boucher of the HABS staff took the photographs in the summer of 1970.